

**What Was the Daishonin's Intent?  
On the Gohonzon  
Studying Nichiren Daishonin's inscriptions on the object of worship  
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As we face the Gohonzon each day, the largest and boldest characters, those of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo down the center, command our attention. We may not even recognize those “word for word,” unless we know the Chinese characters. Our awareness of the other characters on the Gohonzon may be even vaguer — simply that they are the ten worlds in our lives, as well as the protective forces of the universe.

Is that enough? Nichiren Daishonin himself told his followers that the Gohonzon exists in faith alone. In other words, it is our faith that activates the power of the Buddha and the Law, not mere intellectual understanding. But there must have been profound thought and wisdom behind the Daishonin's inscription of the Gohonzon as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. The characters encompassed all his study, as well as the history of Buddhism beginning in India and continuing on into China and Japan.

Our awareness of what the Daishonin wrote on the Gohonzon *is* important to our study of Buddhism. As he states in “The True Entity of Life,” “Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 95). Since an awareness of the Daishonin's intent when he inscribed the Gohonzon is particularly important at this time, as we face charges from the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood that the Nichikan Gohonzon is counterfeit and slanderous, this series will study that intent as well as the meaning of each inscription on the Gohonzon.

First and foremost in the Daishonin's mind in inscribing the Gohonzon was enabling all people to attain enlightenment, to realize that they were essentially the Buddha and the ones whose mission it was to spread the wisdom of the Law. So on the Gohonzon he distilled the essence of the Lotus Sutra in the format of the Ceremony in the Air, which is described in the sutra and in which Shakyamuni transfers the Law to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who would propagate it in the future.

In the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, a Treasure Tower rose up from the earth and hung suspended in the air. Through the drama of the Ceremony in the Air, with its marvelous Treasure Tower and awe-inspiring Buddhas who traveled from all across the universe, Shakyamuni drew his disciples' attention to the Law that all Buddhas practice.

Abutsubo, an elderly follower who met Nichiren Daishonin while he was in exile on Sado Island, once asked him what the Treasure Tower signified. In his reply, Nichiren Daishonin writes that “there is no Treasure Tower other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra” and that “there is no Treasure Tower other than Myoho-enge-kyo” (MW-1, 30). The first step in understanding the Daishonin's intent in inscribing the Gohonzon is to know that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo down the center illuminates all the ten worlds and represents the attainment of enlightenment. It is a condition like the Daishonin's, full of wisdom and compassion in the face of life's sufferings, including the suffering brought on by propagation of the Law.

In the next installment, we'll discuss the characters on either side of Nam at the very top of the Gohonzon — Shakyamuni (left, as we face the Gohonzon) and Taho (right). When it first appeared, the Treasure Tower was closed. But from inside came the voice of Taho Buddha, praising Shakyamuni for preaching the Lotus Sutra. Then Shakyamuni opened the door, sat down next to Taho, and the Ceremony in the Air began.

*One in a series*

Title: What Was the Daishonin's Intent?  
Subject: World Tribune 01/23/98 n.3175 p.6 WT980123p06  
Author: Terry Ellis  
Keywords: Concepts Daishonin Gohonzon Intent Nichiren Study Terms Tribune World